

The park system outlined in this Plan includes the following classifications:

- Pocket Park
- Neighborhood Park
- Community Park
- Regional Park
- Metro Park
- Linear Park
- Special Purpose Parks
 - Park Reserve/Natural Areas
 - Plaza or Square
 - Cultural or Historical Park

The City's park classifications are very similar to those recommended by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA). In fact, the *Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines* published by the NRPA in 1996 have been a principal reference source. NRPA classifications include mini-park (or pocket park), neighborhood park, community park, large urban park, natural resource area, greenway (or linear park), sports complex, and special use. Houston's park system divides large urban parks into regional parks (less than 200 acres) and metro parks (greater than 200 acres). Also, natural areas are listed under special purpose parks, and sports complexes are included in regional and metro parks.

Except for the addition of pocket parks, the City's system of park types has been in place for a number of years and was previously outlined in *The Recovery Action Program* completed March, 1992, for the City and Federal government, and as part of the *Parks to Standard Program*, dated April, 1994.

The pocket park classification has been added as a means to provide public open space in existing neighborhoods where no park currently exists, and where land availability is low and land costs are high.

For each park type, a general description is given along with the following development guidelines:

- Size
- Service Area
- Location and Access
- Use Hours
- Parking
- Typical Development
- Optional Facilities
- Facility Setbacks
- Park Lighting
- Development Costs

Notable is the inclusion of guidelines addressing location and access, facility setbacks, and development costs. The most important factors, however, are location and access. They play a key role in good park visibility and the quality of the park environment. The *Parks to Standard Program* places considerable emphasis on the need to reduce the potential for crime at existing parks by altering landscape, lighting, and amenity design as well as increasing surveillance opportunities. Poorly configured park sites with inadequate street frontage have necessitated part of this effort. With better exposure to adjoining streets, security is enhanced and the park becomes a more visible and appreciated asset to the community, especially by those who may never actually set foot in the park. Thus, the development guidelines establish street frontage minimums for neighborhood, community and regional parks.

The quality of a park environment is strongly influenced by adjacent land uses and the type of adjoining streets. A neighborhood park, for example, should ideally be surrounded by residential uses on quiet residential streets. However, a regional park, especially one with lighted athletic fields, would be best located adjacent to a major thoroughfare and away from homes. The classification system provides guidance in this regard for each park type.

Also recommended are facility setbacks to establish the minimum desired distances between certain park uses and the perimeter property line or street rights-of-way. (Requirements for setbacks are commonly found in municipal ordinances regulating private land development, including the City of Houston's. However, setbacks are rarely found in municipal park system master plans and no national standards have been defined.) Park development setbacks for Houston are specified for several reasons:

1. Safety – Example: playground setbacks from streets
2. Respect for adjacent properties – Example: basketball pavilion setbacks from single family homes
3. Aesthetics – Example: parking lot setbacks from streets.

Facility setback guidelines provide an additional means to evaluate the feasibility of desired uses in a park site under consideration for acquisition. Furthermore, properly sized setbacks can reduce grounds maintenance costs by sizing areas for maintenance with larger equipment, thereby decreasing the need for hand-mowing and trimming.

Finally, the guidelines provide general information on likely ranges of development costs for neighborhood, community and regional parks. Other park types such as metro parks, pocket parks or plazas and squares can, of course, have widely variable development costs. Site acquisition costs are not included in the Development Guidelines but are addressed in the Implementation Guidelines.

Collectively, these guidelines define “ideal” parks. Providing needed parks and open space in already developed urban areas will require flexibility because of local conditions and land availability. Application to various existing parks will likely require the use of the transitional guidelines that are later described.

Pocket Park

A pocket park is the smallest park classification and should be considered as an alternative where providing a typical neighborhood park is impractical. Pocket parks provide a means to provide open space and meet recreational needs in densely populated urban neighborhoods. The site should be residential in character and afford a quiet setting for park use. Development should have a strong emphasis on passive uses such as picnic areas and sitting areas. Providing shade is important. All portions of the site should be readily visible from adjoining streets to provide a more secure environment. Neighborhood resident input during the planning process is essential.

- **Size** - Less than 1 acre
- **Service Area** - Usually less than ½ mile
- **Location and Access**
 - Centrally located *within* the neighborhood and/or easily accessed by residents
 - Frontage required on one street but preferred on two (collector or local streets only)
 - Minimum street frontage of 100 feet
 - Prefer adjacent residences to face or side on the park site instead of backing
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- **Use Hours** - Daytime to early evening through sunset
- **Parking** - None required or desired
- **Typical Development**
 - Picnic tables (2-3 maximum)
 - Small playground
 - Support facilities (benches, bike racks, trash receptacles, drinking fountains, signage, etc.)
 - Tree plantings
- **Optional Facilities**
 - Gazebos or similar shade structures
 - Special horticultural plantings or gardens (maintained by residents)
 - Basketball/tennis/multi-use court (must occupy no more than 25% of park area)
 - Public works of art, monuments/statues, and decorative fountains.
- **Inappropriate Facilities**
 - Multi-use sports pavilion
 - Restrooms
 - Swimming pool

- **Setbacks**
 - Playground:
15' from street R.O.W.
 - Multi-use court:
15' from street R.O.W.
25' from single family residential property lines
- **Park Lighting** - Security and safety only
- **Development Costs**
Can range from \$50,000 to \$200,000 depending on scope of development as influenced by neighborhood input.

Neighborhood Park

The neighborhood park is the basic unit of the park system and should serve as the recreational focus of an individual neighborhood. Surrounding uses should be predominantly single family or multi-family residential. Playgrounds, trails and useable open spaces are normally high priorities. Park development should achieve a balance between active use areas such as sports fields and game courts and passive use areas intended for sitting, picnicking, and relaxing. As a general rule, about half of the park's area should be planned for passive activities and comprised of natural features. Active recreational facilities should be used mostly in an informal and unstructured manner. Uses requiring chain link fencing should be minimized in order to make the park visually attractive. With the possible exception of limited use by youth teams, neighborhood parks are not intended for programmed activities that attract users from outside the neighborhood or encourage overuse, or create noise, glare, parking problems, and street congestion. All areas of the park should be readily visible from adjoining streets in order to provide a secure environment. Opportunities for neighborhood input should be provided regarding park development or redevelopment given the wide variety and the changing character of many of Houston's residential neighborhoods.

- **Size** - 1 to 10 acres, 5 acres optimum.
- **Service Area** - ½ mile desirable to 1 mile maximum radius, preferably uninterrupted by major thoroughfares and other major physical barriers.
- **Location and Access**
 - Centrally located *within* the neighborhood and/or easily accessed by residents
 - Frontage required on at least 2 collector and/or local streets; major thoroughfare frontage is undesirable.
 - Minimum street frontage of 500 feet (approximately equals the mathematical square root of 5 acres x 43,560 square feet per acre.)
 - Prefer surrounding residences to face park site instead of backing
 - Access to adequate water, sewer and electric service.
- **Use Hours** - Daytime to early evening through sunset.
- **Parking** - Street or curbside parking. On-site parking should be provided only where required by City parking ordinance or where adjoining streets are not curbed and gutted to encourage mostly pedestrian access. Consideration should be given to improving the street instead of constructing on-site parking.
- **Typical Development**
 - Playground
 - Passive recreational open space
 - Sports field(s) for practice or non-league play (unlighted)
 - Trails (¼ mile increments preferred)

- Picnic tables (5-6 maximum)
- Support facilities (benches, bike racks, trash receptacles, drinking fountains, signage, etc.)
- Tree plantings
- **Optional Facilities**
 - Picnic shelters
 - Basketball/multi-use court
 - Tennis courts (1-2)
 - Special horticultural plantings or gardens (principally maintained by neighborhood residents)
 - Swimming pool (if the nearest public pool is more than two miles away)
- **Inappropriate Facilities:**
 - Lighted athletic fields
 - Recreation center
 - Multi-use sports pavilion
 - Restrooms
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- **Setbacks**
 - On-site parking:
 - 10' from street right-of-way
 - 25' from single family residential properties
 - Playground:
 - 25' from street right-of-way
 - 25' from other property line
 - Multi-use court or swimming pool:
 - 25' from street right-of-way
 - 50' from single family residential properties
- **Park Lighting**
 - Generally intended for security and safety.
 - Very limited facility lighting, preferably lighted tennis courts only with no glare to adjoining residential uses.
- **Development Costs**
 - Can range from \$100,000 to \$300,000 depending on existing site conditions and scope of development as influenced by neighborhood input.
 - A neighborhood park will likely include most, but not necessarily all of the typical facilities listed above.

Community Park

Community parks are typically larger in size than a neighborhood park and serve several neighborhoods with both active and passive recreational facilities. Group activities are well accommodated. They may include highly used recreational facilities such as programmed athletic sports fields, swimming pools and recreation centers, which are less appropriate in neighborhood parks. Community parks may also contain large passive open space areas or preserve unique landscapes. About 25% - 50% should be planned as undeveloped greenspace. They provide needed visual breaks in the City, particularly when located along major thoroughfares. Most of the park should be visible from adjoining streets. Sites located contiguous to linear parks provide the opportunity to connect with multiple residential neighborhoods via hike and bike trails. Neighborhood park facilities may also be provided within a community park to serve a specific neighborhood.

- **Size** - 5-50 acres (10 acre minimum preferable)
- **Service Area** - 1 mile – 3 miles
- **Location**
 - Adjacent to, or in close proximity to, predominantly single-family and multi-family residential areas.
 - Frontage required on collector streets (not local neighborhood streets).
 - Direct access to major thoroughfare desirable or within ¼ mile.
 - Park access by public transit or designated bikeway desirable
 - Minimum street frontage of 700 feet (Approximately equals the mathematical square root of 10 acres x 43,560 square feet per acre.)
 - Access to adequate water, sewer and electric service.
- **Use Hours** - Daytime and evening use
- **Parking**
 - As required by City parking ordinance for traditional facilities
 - Parking lots located just off-street; vehicular traffic prohibited within park
 - Optional gates at parking lot entrance
- **Typical Facilities**
 - Medium to large playground
 - Passive recreational open space
 - Sports fields (lighted) for practice and league play
 - Basketball/multi-use court
 - Trails (¼ mile increments with distance signage)
 - Picnic area with up to 15 tables
 - Group picnic facility (open-air pavilion with 4-5 tables on concrete slab and large grill)

- Support facilities (benches, bike racks, trash receptacles, drinking fountains, access walks, signage, etc.)
- Landscaping
- **Optional Facilities**
 - Recreation center with gym, multi-use meeting and activity spaces, offices, restrooms, kitchen and optional weight/exercise room
 - Tennis courts (2-4 lighted)
 - Multi-use pavilion (i.e. basketball, lighted)
 - Swimming pool with bathhouse
 - Visually screened portable toilets
- **Setbacks**
 - On-site parking:
 - 10' from street right-of-way.
 - 50' from single family residential property line
 - Playground:
 - 25' from street right-of-way and other property lines
 - Multi-use pavilion:
 - 25' from street right-of-way
 - 100' from any residential property
 - Recreation center:
 - 25' from street right-of-way
 - 50' from single family residential properties
 - Swimming pool:
 - 25' from street right-of-way
 - 50' from single family residential property line
 - Tennis Courts:
 - 25' from street right-of-way
 - 10' from other property lines
- **Park Lighting**
 - Facility lighting at ballfields, pavilions, courts, etc. and associated parking
 - Security lighting at playgrounds, trails and exterior perimeters of park structures
 - Avoid glare to adjoining residential uses
- **Development Costs** - Can range from \$500,000 to \$4,000,000 depending on existing conditions and scope of development as influenced by community input. A community park will likely include many, but not all, of the typical facilities listed above.

Regional Park

Regional parks supplement neighborhood and community parks, serving broader based recreation needs in addition to those addressed by smaller parks. The increased size permits large-scale development of both passive and active facilities providing a wide range of recreational pursuits. Regional parks should include sizeable areas of undeveloped land with natural vegetation and/or water features. Where possible, major thoroughfares should be routed around regional parks rather than through them.

- **Size** - 50-200 acres
- **Service Area** - Up to 5 miles
- **Location**
 - Some residential development may be within a short walking distance of the site, but high use activity areas should be segregated from adjacent residential areas.
 - Frontage required on major thoroughfares and collector streets.
 - Park access by public transit or designated bikeway desirable.
 - Minimum street frontage of 1,500 feet (approximately equals the mathematical square root of 50 acres x 43,560 square feet per acre).
 - Multiple access points to water, sewer and electric service preferred.
- **Use hours** - Daytime through late evening use; some facilities open 24 hours.
- **Parking**
 - One or more parking lots (i.e. 100-300 cars each) possibly serviced by internal roads.
 - Gates located at parking lot entrances.
- **Typical Development**
 - Large playground
 - Passive recreational open spaces and reserves
 - Sports complexes (lighted) with 3 or more fields per sport and concession building
 - Basketball/multi-use courts
 - Trails (½ mile increments with distance signage)
 - One or more picnic areas
 - One or more picnic pavilions of varying size
 - Support facilities (benches, bike racks, trash receptacles, drinking fountains, access walks, signage, etc.)
 - Landscaping
- **Optional Facilities**
 - 18-hole golf course and clubhouse
 - Tennis courts (2-8, lighted)

- Tennis center
- Swimming pool with bathhouse
- Screened portable toilets / restrooms
- Multi-use pavilion (i.e. basketball, lighted)
- Natatorium (indoor pool)
- Nature trails or nature areas
- Multi-purpose center for recreational use and other City services (health, library, etc.)
- Senior citizens center
- Fishing access sites (i.e. decks, piers)
- **Setbacks**
Equal to or greater than those specified for community parks:
 - On-site parking:
 - 10' from street right-of-way.
 - 50' from single family residential property line
 - Playground:
 - 25' from street right-of-way and other property lines
 - Multi-use pavilion:
 - 25' from street right-of-way
 - 100' from any residential property
 - Recreation center:
 - 25' from street right-of-way
 - 50' from single family residential properties
 - Swimming pool:
 - 25' from street right-of-way
 - 50' from single family residential property line
 - Tennis Courts:
 - 25' from street right-of-way
 - 10' from other property lines
- **Park Lighting**
 - Facility and security lighting similar to community park
 - Park drives and major entrance points
 - Trail lighting – optional.
- **Development Costs** - Can range from \$1,000,000 to \$5,000,000. A regional park may include a wide variety, but not all, of the facilities listed above.

Metro Park

Metro parks have potential for a wide range of uses. They serve active and passive recreational needs and provide for cultural activities as well. A principal role of these parks, however, is to preserve ecologically unique areas and to provide places to observe and learn about nature. Consequently, intensive uses such as museums, special event facilities, swimming pools, golf courses and lighted athletic facilities must be carefully integrated into these open space parks. Active areas should be relatively compact with large surrounding areas of natural or open space. As a goal, at least 50% of the site of a suburban metro park should be undeveloped, especially those with ecologically sensitive areas. The City's Major Thoroughfare Plan must also be consulted to determine its influence or impact on the site. For example, the current Plan extends Reed Road within the northern portion of Law Park. Major thoroughfares crossing a metro park can be either beneficial (Ex: Memorial Park) or detrimental (Ex: Herman Brown Park).

- **Size** - 200+ acres
- **Service Area** - Citywide
- **Location**
 - Determined by resource availability and opportunities to utilize and/or protect the resource.
 - Access from freeways, highways, major thoroughfares, public transit and bike-ways.
- **Use Hours** - Daytime through late evening use; some facilities open 24 hours.
- **Parking**
 - One or more parking lots (i.e. 100-300 cars each) possibly serviced by internal roads.
 - Gates located at parking lot entrances.
- **Typical Development** - Same as regional parks
- **Optional Facilities** - Same as regional parks plus cultural and special event facilities
 - Horticultural centers
 - Unique recreational activities upon approval by Director with advice from appropriate park advocacy organizations
- **Setbacks**
 - On-site parking:
 - 20' from perimeter street R.O.W.
 - 100' from single family residential properties
 - 25' from perimeter boundaries for above-ground buildings, other structures, and facility-specific fencing.

- **Park Lighting** - Same as regional parks
- **Development Costs** - Highly variable, generally ranging upwards of \$2,000,000 depending on menu of facilities desired.

Linear Park

Linear parks are greenways of open space that offer scenic beauty and allow safe, uninterrupted pedestrian or bicycle movement along natural or man-made corridors. They are generally located along bayous and streams and/or in association with major thoroughfares or boulevards. When combined with the City's planned bikeway system, linear parks can link various other parks, residential neighborhoods, schools, libraries and businesses. Pedestrian and bicycle trails can accommodate both recreational and purposeful trips. Linear parks provide breaks in the urban development pattern, conserve ecologically unique areas along bayous, and provide long stretches of open space well suited for trails. Existing tree cover within natural corridors should be protected.

In Houston, most if not all bayou corridors are protected by an easement or owned in fee simple by the Harris County Flood Control District (HCFCD). Consequently, linear park development usually requires coordination and joint-use agreements between the City and County. Unencumbered additional land, outside of the floodway, should be acquired along bayous where possible to enhance the usability of linear parks for recreational purposes and amenities.

- **Size** - A minimum width of 50 feet; length is variable.
- **Service Area** - City quadrant to citywide
- **Location**
 - Determined by resource availability, linkage need, and opportunities for public access utilizing the resource.
 - The design of new subdivisions for adjacent private land should be encouraged to facilitate visibility, access, safety, and access for maintenance. Long stretches of lots backing to the corridor should be avoided. Adjacency to parallel streets, looped streets and cul-de-sacs is preferred. Better visibility and access provides a more secure environment and allows the linear park to become a community-wide asset.
- **Use Hours** - Daytime and early evening use, trails may be open 24 hours.
- **Parking** - On-street parking preferred, except along major thoroughfares. Parking lots for trail users should be small and infrequent (1+ mile spacing).
- **Typical Facilities**
 - Pedestrian trails and/or bike paths
 - Support facilities (benches, bike racks, trash receptacles, drinking fountains, access/connector walks, signage, etc.)
 - Landscaping

- **Optional Facilities**
 - Small picnic area
 - Small playground
 - Screened portable toilets
 - Exercise stations
 - Public works of art, monuments/ statues, and decorative fountains.
- **Setbacks** - Trails paralleling major thoroughfares should generally be setback at least 10' from the edge of the street curb.
- **Park Lighting**
 - Security night lighting at picnic areas, playgrounds and trails.
 - Where adjacent to streets, make dual use of street light poles to supplement park lighting.
- **Development Costs** - Bike paths and usual support facilities average \$50 per linear foot according to the Comprehensive Bikeway Plan.

Special Purpose Park

This category addresses a wide variety of special places or facilities, which focus on locally unique or significant natural, historic, or cultural resources. They can be individual sites or part of larger parks. Special purpose parks include the following:

- Park Reserve/Natural Area
- Plaza or Square
- Cultural or Historical Park

Park Reserve/Natural Area (Ex: Hogg Bird Sanctuary Park)

Natural areas, wildlife preserves and other park reserves are intended for both conservation and public enjoyment/education. Access to environmentally sensitive areas may be restricted to protect vegetation or wildlife habitat. Site development is limited and strictly passive. Motorized vehicular and bicycle traffic is prohibited within the park.

- **Size** - 10+ acres
- **Service Area** - Non-applicable
- **Location** - Resource-based
- **Use Hours** - Daytime only
- **Parking**
 - Street parking preferred
 - Limited on-site parking at park perimeter only
- **Typical Development**
 - Unpaved trails
 - Wildlife observation stations, with benches
 - Drinking fountains at trail heads
 - Fishing access at ponds or lakes
 - Park identification and sign regulations
 - Interpretive/directional signage along trails
- **Optional Facilities** - Visually screened portable toilets at safe locations
- **Setbacks** - Not-applicable
- **Park Lighting** - Generally, none
- **Development Costs** - Limited, usually less than \$75,000.

Plaza or Square (Ex: Tranquillity Park)

Plaza or squares are usually highly developed, smaller sites located within the central city. Most feature intensive hardscape or softscape type development. Many have been established for commemorative purposes. Park use is passive with some sites functioning as venues for festivals and special events. Park is accessed by walking and Metro transit stops are likely nearby.

- **Size** - Less than 10 acres (most are less than five acres)
- **Service Area** - Highly visible – can range from surrounding neighborhood to entire City.
- **Location**
 - Urban areas; mostly within the Central Business District and environs
 - Generally on major streets with excellent street access
- **Use Hours**
 - Varies, but usually daytime to early evening.
 - Downtown sites may have late evening use for special events.
- **Parking**
 - No surface level parking on-site.
 - Subsurface parking may be used at downtown sites.
- **Typical Facilities**
 - Focal points:
 - Decorative fountains or waterscapes
 - Monuments
 - Public art
 - Banners, flags
 - Special or enhanced paving
 - Extensive horticultural plantings
 - Decorative site furniture (benches, trash receptacles, etc.)
 - Support facilities (drinking fountain, signage, etc.)
- **Optional Facilities**
 - Small stage area for public presentations and performances
 - Gazebos or similar shade structures
- **Setbacks** - Not-applicable

- **Park Lighting**
 - General site lighting, frequently with decorative light fixtures
 - Accent lighting of focal points
 - Tree up/down lighting
- **Development Costs**

Highly variable, but often include private cost participation and substantial community input with regard to the development program.

Cultural or Historical Park (Ex: Sam Houston Park)

Park is accessed by pedestrians via walkways, sidewalks, promenades or trails around and through the site. These park sites are established primarily to present and preserve cultural or historical themes for public education and enjoyment. Park use is typically passive and site development emphasizes the cultural or historical theme.

- **Size** - Varies, generally 25 acres or less
- **Service Area** - Community to citywide
- **Location**
 - Varies
 - More than 50% of the site boundaries adjoin public streets.
- **Use Hours**
 - Generally, daytime use only
 - Evening use associated with special events or activities.
- **Parking**
 - On site or adjacent parking lots as well as curbside parking
 - Areas for tour or school bus loading and unloading
- **Typical Development**
 - Focal points
 - Decorative fountain
 - Monuments
 - Historical buildings or structures
 - Public art
 - Special signage:
 - Historical markers
 - Interpretative/informational signage
 - Streetscape furnishings
 - Landscaping

- **Optional Facilities**
 - Picnic areas
 - Visitors information center
- **Setbacks** - None, other than those required by the City's *Subdivisions, Development and Platting Ordinance* or private deed restrictions.
- **Park Lighting**
 - General site security lighting, perhaps with decorative light fixtures
 - Accent lighting for focal points
 - Tree up/down lighting
- **Development Costs** - Variable, depending on the extent of cultural or historical resources to be presented

TRANSITION GUIDELINES

While the park classification system and development guidelines easily apply to acquiring and developing new park sites, their applicability to many existing parks presents a greater challenge. This is especially true at the neighborhood park level where a number of sites have long been developed with recreational facilities that attract users from an area much greater than the immediately surrounding neighborhood. Because of related traffic, noise, glare and late evening use, facilities such as lighted athletic fields, lighted basketball pavilions, community centers and swimming pools are more appropriate at community and larger sized parks. Also, certain parks may have insufficient street frontage or facility setbacks as measured against the development guidelines. Thus, it becomes important to identify the nonconforming parks and establish methods to change them into facilities that meet the standard classification system.

Generally, the classification system will work satisfactorily as is with the City's larger parks, linear parks, and special use parks. For larger park sites, the distinction between community, regional and metro parks is mostly a matter of size and resulting scale of development. All three will accommodate high-use facilities. However, the distinction between community and neighborhood parks is more critical. More intensive uses should be kept out of neighborhood parks in order to avoid negative impacts of traffic, light or noise to nearby residents.

Reworking older, smaller parks to the newer standards requires further, individual assessment using the following steps:

Step 1: Evaluate the park site and determine its best classification based on location, neighboring uses and access factors rather than its acreage or current facilities.

Step 2: Identify nonconforming uses and facilities within the park based on its classification as established in Step 1.

Step 3: Evaluate whether the park has sufficient visibility and access, appropriate for its size, from adjoining streets.

Step 4: Seek remedies to alleviate the nonconforming uses including mitigation.

Completing this assessment will set the parameters for future development or redevelopment of the park and its eventual transition into one that meets the standard classification system. Assessments of existing parks can occur at any time but most logically as they are addressed in the Parks to Standard Program for renovation and redevelopment. Appendix F provides a suggested worksheet for recording and implementing the transition guidelines. The worksheet includes columns to list the park name, its existing classification, changes required pursuant to the transition guidelines, and the revised classification.

Step 1

Site evaluation criteria in order of importance, are the following:

- 1) What land uses are immediately adjacent to the park and within close proximity?

A neighborhood-sized park may be suitably designated as a community park if encompassed by numerous uses other than single family residential that would not be impacted by higher intensity recreational uses. Conversely, a 10+ acre park site located in the middle of a residential subdivision may be more appropriately classified as a neighborhood park instead of a community park.

- 2) What types of streets adjoin the park and provide access?

A neighborhood-sized park may be suitably designated as a community park if fronting on and taking access from: a) major thoroughfares and/or collector streets as designated on the City's Major Thoroughfare and Freeway Plan, or b) other collector streets with single-family homes backing to the street.

- 3) What type of streets is used to access the park from a major thoroughfare?

If one must travel through a single-family subdivision to get to the park, the site should be considered as a neighborhood park, even if located on the edge of the residential area. If the primary access route already includes road humps, the site is more likely suited for neighborhood park type facilities.

- 4) Does the park have direct public transit access?

A park conveniently served by Metro would be an indication of its suitability for community park purposes.

Step 2

Using the site evaluation criteria to determine the appropriate park type will then determine the appropriateness of the existing park facilities. Also to be critiqued are the facility setbacks prescribed for each park type. Inappropriate facilities or those that are acceptable but lack the proper setbacks are deemed "nonconforming uses". This term is commonly used in cities with zoning ordinances to indicate a use or structure that was acceptable at the time it was begun, but could not presently be initiated, used, or constructed under current regulations. Thus, a lighted basketball pavilion in a neighborhood park for example, would be considered nonconforming based on the recommended park development standards. The nonconformity would be subject to the following guidelines:

- A nonconforming use should not be expanded or enlarged.
- If fire, the elements, or other act destroys a nonconforming use, it may not be rebuilt without conforming to the park development guidelines. Partial destruction of a non-

conforming use not exceeding approximately two-thirds of its reasonable value may be rebuilt but its size or function cannot be expanded.

- Repairs and nonstructural alterations may be made to a nonconforming use
- A nonconforming facility whose use is discontinued for more than one year should not be re-instituted without being brought into conformance.

Step 3

Conformity of a park site itself to the standards is equally as important as the conformity of its facilities.

Before addressing nonconforming facilities, the park site itself should be evaluated for its adequacy of street frontage. As discussed in the park development guidelines, the amount of street frontage directly determines a park's accessibility and visibility. Both are critical to providing a safe and secure park environment.

The park development guidelines recommend minimum lengths of street frontage for neighborhood, community and regional parks based on typical acreages for each park type. For older, smaller parks, a modified means is needed to specify appropriate street frontage, especially for neighborhood parks less than the five-acre desired size and for community parks less than the ten-acre minimum size. A simple approach is to use the mathematical square root of the park's total square footage as the basis for desired street frontage. Thus, a one acre park should have about 210 feet of street frontage, a two acre park should have at least 295 feet of frontage, and so on up to the standards prescribed in the development guidelines. Existing parks not meeting this modified standard should be evaluated for opportunities to increase the street frontage. Additional land will likely be required. Acquiring additional land to increase street frontage can also serve to remove objectionable adjacent uses such as the auto junkyard next to Beech White Park in the Central Sector of the City. In some locations, parks may already front dedicated streets that have never been paved. Street construction could improve park access without the need for additional land.

Bringing a park site up to standards with respect to street frontage could also bring facilities into conformance as a result of increasing the park acreage and setbacks. The cost to improve a park's access and visibility from adjoining streets must also be weighed against the alternative costs for adding security lighting and on-site trails for use by patrol vehicles.

Step 4

Nonconforming facilities within a park should be addressed and remedied to the greatest extent possible under the Parks to Standard Program or prior to further site development. The following are suggested facility evaluation criteria for rehabilitating, demolishing, replacing or relocating nonconforming facilities:

- 1) Is the facility needed to meet neighborhood or community needs?
- 2) Does the facility have historic value to the community?
- 3) To what extent is the current facility used?
- 4) Has the location and use of the current facility generated neighborhood complaints?
- 5) What is the proximity of the nearest similar facility?
- 6) Could the facility be relocated to a more appropriate site serving the community, or perhaps to a nearby school site?
- 7) Can the facility be adapted to other needed, conforming facilities?
- 8) Is the facility a crime problem?
- 9) Does the facility have abnormal maintenance and utility demands?
- 10) Can the facility be repaired, brought into ADA compliance, or adapted to new use for less than 65% of replacement value?

The response to these questions will provide a justifiable means of evaluating a nonconforming facility and of determining its future. Undoubtedly, there will be situations where nonconforming facilities will remain in place. Measures may be needed to mitigate negative impacts on adjacent homes or the surrounding neighborhood. Mitigation could include the following:

- Buffering and screening with plant materials or opaque fencing while still observing crime prevention through environmental design (C.P.T.E.D.) principles
- Directional lighting at ballfields or tennis courts to reduce offsite light spillage and glare
- Reducing early morning and evening use hours
- Removing lights at ballfields and pavilions that currently allow late evening use
- Directing parking lot access points away from residential streets

Mitigation of nonconforming facilities should be based on site conditions and discussed with affected residents.